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Numerology and Cryptography in the Music of Lili Boulanger: The Hidden Program in Clairières dans le ciel

Bonnie Jo Dopp

> The most convincing women's art I see, of any style, is very personal, and by being very personal finds a system of its own.
>
> —*Lucy Lippard, "Six"*

Close study of Lili Boulanger's longest work, *Clairières dans le ciel,* a cycle of thirteen songs set to poetry by symbolist poet Francis Jammes, when combined with facts from her biography, reveals that Boulanger hid a secret program in the piece. Questions raised by study of other of her works may be answered in part by considering some elements of those pieces as extensions or precursors of the program in the song cycle.

Born in Paris in 1893, Lili Boulanger came to maturity at a time when personal systems of composition relatively inaccessible to public understanding or imitation flourished in Europe. Nadia Boulanger, Lili's older sister by six years, disliked such music, holding that it was "almost impossible to analyze."[1] Regarding the atonal works of Schoenberg, Robert P. Morgan has said, "It seems highly unlikely . . . that this music will ever give up its 'secrets' to anything like the extent that compositions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have (or others of the twentieth century, for that matter)." He allows for clarity gained from repeated hearings and deep study, but says that knowledge of its secrets "would undermine . . . the essential nature of this music and significantly alter its historical and aesthetic meaning. More importantly, the music would thereby lose perhaps its most distinguishing expressive feature: its very mystery."[2]

An opposing view suggests that learning the secrets created from a system of a composer's own devising and buried in music aids in understanding "historical and aesthetic meaning," and that uncovering mysteries in music allows greater appreciation of the scope and power of mystery itself, a more fearless entering of its vast sphere, a stronger

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Lili Boulanger (from around 1913, original in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.). Photo courtesy Library of Congress.

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connection to artists providing shafts of light in the fog. Mystery may love company.[3]

Such effort requires proper tools. Roy Howat's discovery of the exacting mathematical proportions Debussy employed in his work has sent scholars to their calculators. Decoding cryptographic aspects of some works has depended on the existence of a document, like the annotated miniature score of *Lyric Suite* that Alban Berg left behind.[4] Lacking such a key, a composer's biography may serve to decipher a musical roman à clef.

Because music and numbers are inextricable, Lili Boulanger's documented self-identification with a number provides a biographic element that seems worthy of exploration in this context. Léonie Rosenstiel, working on her 1974 doctoral dissertation on Lili, discovered in interviews with the composer's closest friend, Miki Piré, that the young composer had attached herself to the number thirteen. Nadia, who did not allow Rosenstiel full access to Lili's letters and diaries, somewhat reluctantly confirmed this. Later, Rosenstiel said Lili attached "mystical significance" to the number thirteen. Rosenstiel has characterized Lili as an "independent mystic" and said that fact "terrified Nadia."[5]

Rosenstiel's sources said Lili felt connected to thirteen because her name contained thirteen letters and because her initials can be written to resemble "13," as shown in Figure 1. This was her chosen logo and can be found on most of her published works. Adopting thirteen as her "lucky number" could well have represented laughter in the face of fate for Lili, who was extremely sick all her life.[6] She knew from childhood that she could not expect a long, robust maturity, that though she was feminine, pretty, and popular, she could never become a wife and mother, and that though music was the field of her greatest joy and talent, she was too frail to become a professional musician. She had a merry sense of humor and delighted in wordplay, but she displayed an intense seriousness about making something of herself as a composer. At sixteen, she announced her goal of winning the First Grand Prize in composition of the Prix de Rome.[7] A scant four years later she achieved it, the first woman to do so in music.[8] She won the prize in 1913, seven weeks before her twentieth birthday, and she was one of thirteen contestants that year. Such happenstance must have reinforced her feeling that she was inextricably linked to the number thirteen.[9]

Biographical research heavily dependent on letters and interviews with Nadia indicates that Lili's first effort at composition dates from 1906, the year she was thirteen years old, and that after winning the

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Lili BOULANGER

CLAIRIÈRES DANS LE CIEL

pour chant et piano

Paroles de Francis Jammes

Révision de Nadia Boulanger

DURAND Editions Musicales
215, RUE DU Fbg St-HONORÉ 75008 PARIS
United Music Publishers Ltd. London.
Theodore Presser Company, Bryn Mawr (U.S.A.)

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Figure 1. Title page of *Clairières dans le ciel,* 1970 ed., showing Lili Boulanger's logo resembling the number 13. © 1970 Durand S.A. Used by permission. Sole representative U.S.A. Theodore Presser Company.

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Prix de Rome, she destroyed thirteen of her early compositions. Lili composed music for several biblical texts in whose titles some form of "13" figured: Psalms 130, 131, and 137, and 1 Corinthians 13.[10]

Lili seems to have exploited the dark connotations thirteen carries in Western culture when she allowed an ostinato bass of thirteen measures to illustrate the "shades of the victims of the Trojan War" in her Prix de Rome cantata, *Faust et Hélène.*[11] Those who know the tarot tradition, however, where the thirteenth card (Fig. 2) represents death, know that the interpretation of that card carried the idea of regeneration. Here the Grim Reaper works a field of human heads, hands, and feet, inspiring the comment published in France in the 1880s regarding the deathless nature of art: "The works of the head (conception) become immortal as soon as they are realized (hands and feet)."[12]

The last measures of the opening page of song 1 of *Clairières dans le ciel,* in E major (Ex. 2), have caused thoughtful observers to admit some puzzlement along with their recognition of the composer's unique style. Annegret Fauser, for one, feels "Luft von anderem Planeten" among the augmented eleventh chords here, where B-flats and D-naturals appear in m. 5, joined by A-flats in m. 6.[13] E descends to B-flat in the bass line of this page, suitably reflecting the heroine's having "descendue" to the bottom of a meadow; and in Lili Boulanger's inherited tradition, there is no greater musical distance from E than to B-flat. Recognition of this instance of text painting does not explicate the harmony in these measures, but it does serve as a point of departure for searching out other symbolic gestures in the pages of *Clairières dans le ciel.*

Lili's emotional response to the set of twenty-four poems from which she chose thirteen to set was so deep that Nadia said Lili felt "fusion entre la jeune fille évoquée par Francis Jammes . . . et elle-même."[14] The poems describe various moods engendered by memories of an amorous relationship that had ended with the reluctant parting of the lovers. Had Lili experienced such unhappiness in love? Or was she simply fused with the young woman of the poems because she is never named, but is always called "elle,"—as in Lili's first initial? And she is introduced as being "decked with flowers of plants whose stems love to sprout in water"—water lilies, perhaps? The poetic narrator remembers Elle happily in some verses, with anguish in others. Knowing of her *fusion* with Elle, some scholars have read two sides of Lili's personality into her choice of texts. Lili composed the piece from December 1913 (before leaving for her freshly awarded Roman residency at the Villa Medici) to November 1914 (after her

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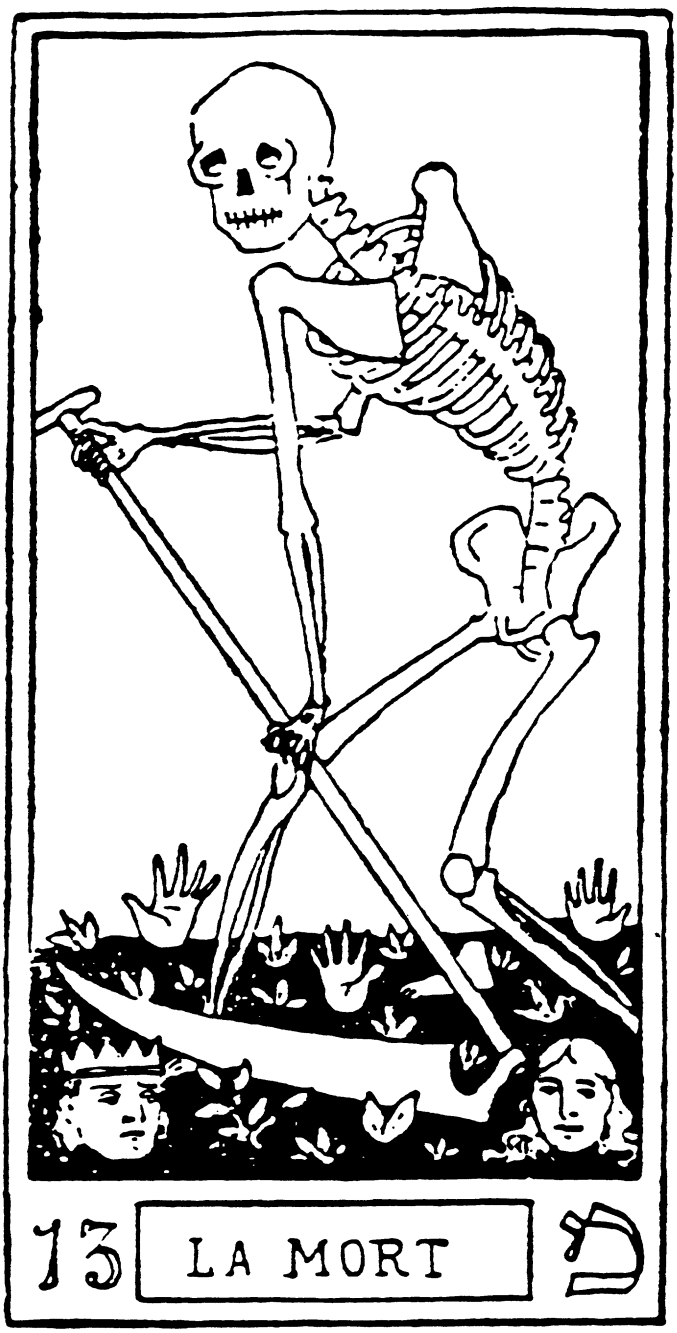

Figure 2. Tarot card 13 from Papus (Gérard Encausse), *The Tarot of the Bohemians: The Absolute Key to Occult Science*, n.d. (c. 1885?)

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Example 1. Song 12 from *Clairières dans le ciel* by Lili Boulanger, 1919 ed., (Ricordi ed.).

short stay in Rome had been disrupted by the beginning of World War I). She died on the ides of March 1918, apparently before ever hearing anyone but herself sing *Clairières,* which was first published the next year.[15] During the first seven months of 1914, after winning the prize that had been her greatest ambition, she was, at twenty, successful, famous, honored for her gifts, praised for her beauty, and charismatically popular. Spring of that year must have been the happiest, most promising season of her life.

Interpreting Lili's decision to set thirteen poems as a reflection of her self-identification with that number has become commonplace among those who write of her; one scholar also noted that Lili placed the thirteenth poem from Jammes's set of twenty-four in the central position of her work, possibly signaling the importance of her number.[16] Here Lili may also have playfully twisted standard ideas about the luckiness of numbers, for her placement of Jammes's thirteenth poem makes it seventh in her work.[17] No one before now seems to

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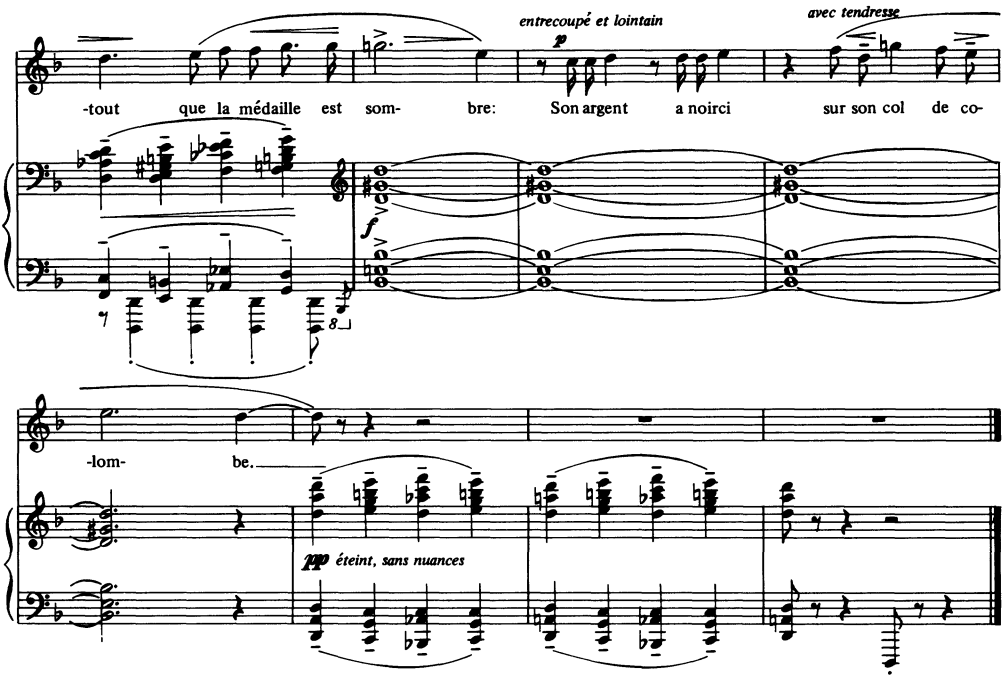
entrecoupé et lointain
avec tendresse
-tout que la médaille est som- bre: Son argent a noirci sur son col de co-
-lom- be.
éteint, sans nuances

I keep a medallion of hers on which are engraved
a date and the words: pray, believe, hope.
But I see above all that the medallion is dark:
its silver has tarnished on her dovelike neck.

Example 1. continued

have investigated the notes themselves of *Clairières dans le ciel* to see if Lili's significant number is somewhere among them. But the number thirteen is a musical number, the interval of a thirteenth being the final addition in the accumulation of thirds that utilizes all seven pitch classes of a diatonic scale. Investigation into the possibility that numerology dictated some of Lili's procedures can begin, in fact, by noting the presence of what look like thirteenth chords in a traditional harmonic analysis of song 12, the shortest of the thirteen songs of *Clairières*.[18]

Audiences acculturated in Western art music will find this *mélodie* (Ex. 1) movingly expressive: a sad song about a man alone with memories of his lost love, whose medallion he holds. Discussion of its expressivity on several levels of symbolism is possible after examining the piece for its formal combination of two-part vocal line and three-part accompaniment, its expression of duality by the bitonal character

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of the accompaniment chords, its wordplay in directing the singer to perform *avec gravité* a song containing the word "gravés," and even its "eye music," provided in rounded, medallionlike shapes resulting from connecting the dots of the top and bottom notes of the accompaniment's first or last measures.[19]

The pitch D dominates song 12. "Je" is sung on D, supported by D–A–D–A–D in the accompaniment; the single deep bass note from the piano at the very end of the song is a D; and the lonely Poet may be represented by D. Seen this way, the thirteen D's in m. 6 under the word "espérer" (hope) bode ill for him.[20]

Missing is the heroine of the poem, Elle. A pitch inventory of the nonchromatic vocal line reveals all the notes of the D-minor scale except B-flat. If the absent B-flat represents the departed Elle, then, since Lili identified herself with Elle, B-flat may also represent Lili, or more precisely, Boulanger. Cosmopolitan Lili could easily have chosen B-flat (in German, simply B) to represent Boulanger, following the example of J. S. Bach.[21]

Tasteful declamation of the alexandrine meter of the French text allows some choices regarding syllabication. Lili chose the reading with the most syllables per line, with three thirteen-syllable lines descending melodically and the sole twelve-syllable line rising "hopefully" (and loudly) on "espérer," briefly supported by a species of half-cadence on a V^7 chord built on G. If Lili were following the system of composition of her predecessors, this would lead to a resolution in the happy, uncomplicated key of C major; but instead, the music is immediately plunged back into D minor. The last syllable of the vocal line is sounded in m. 12 and held to m. 13.

B-flat is found seven times in the three-part accompaniment, always in the bass clef and always in association with D and its tritone. It appears in the bass as the word "elle" is held, creating what may be seen as a coded presentation of the initials LB (i.e., *elle* B-flat). Tritones on both B-flat and D held under the entire last line of text paint a despairing sound in the ear, describing how B-flat and D are each in a state of unresolved longing, especially in relation to each other. Two active people are here, not just one, their relationship symbolically unlucky and doomed by virtue of the thirteen scale degrees (an octave plus a sixth) between their representative notes in D minor, where a B-flat in the key signature and a D on the staff suffice to signal the key. B-flat, then, is D's own "thirteen." But there are other musical relationships possible between these two notes.

D sounds twelve times in the two-part vocal line and twenty-four times as the bass note in the accompaniment. A truly committed

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secret-number symbolist would even consider the open fifths and fourths of the accompaniment to be reduced intervals of twelfths that used together, would signify twenty-four. The twelve instances of this double-twelve construct involving D in song 12 use twenty-four D's in all. He, the Poet—D—may be as tied to the numbers two, twelve, and/or twenty-four as she, Elle—B-flat—is to three, seven, and thirteen. In the key of B-flat major, these notes are scale degrees 1 and 3, but also, carried up a sufficient number of octaves, there are twenty-four scale degrees between them in that key. D, then, is B-flat's own "twenty-four."

This song can be seen as a double portrait of the imaginary characters of the poems, of Lili and an imaginary lover or abstract concept, or of Lili and an actual person she identified with the number twelve or twenty-four and the initial D. For a justified deduction, more evidence is needed.

Figure 3 supports the conclusion that the numbers twelve and twenty-four should be seen in relation to thirteen throughout the cycle. Lili set thirteen out of twenty-four poems. If she had identified someone in her life with the number twenty-four, someone she thought of as a lost love, she might have been drawn numerologically, as well as emotionally, to this set. Her thirteenth song was Jammes's twenty-fourth poem. She linked songs 1 and 2 using incomplete measures and instructions to enchain the songs, creating "1 + 2." Texts of her songs 1 + 2 were taken from poems 2 + 4 of the Jammes collection. Song 3 begins with an incomplete measure of a duration that completes the measure that ends song 1, so that songs 1 and 3 can be thought of as enchained, creating "1 + 3."[22]

Song 1 (Ex. 2) opens with a thirteen-syllable line followed by a twenty-four-syllable line, and here Lili set three lines from Jammes as two. Measures 1 and 3 have exactly the same accompaniment, in E major. This may represent Elle's joy, for as the major key of B-flat's tritone, it is as happily distant from her suffering as anything musical can be. The word "elle," associated with E major from the start, is sung on B, supported by E in the accompaniment. *Si* and *mi* are the only two notes in the French scale with vowel sounds that match Li-li. Composers encrypting names in scores use this system frequently. However, Lili may have had a different coded meaning in mind for these notes. The vocal line opens with intervals of a unison and a third (1 and 3), which span mm. 1 and 2, and the actual pitches are degrees 13 and 1 of D major. Measures 2 and 4 are alike in the accompaniment; the harmony may be read as D major, the Poet's hopeful key, perhaps. B-flat, the tritone of E, may be Boulanger when

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Organization of texts		
Jammes	Boulanger	
2	1	Enchained, Songs 1 + 2 = 52 measures (13 × 4)
4	2	
5	3	Because measure 1 of Song 3 is a fragment, Songs 1 + 3
6	4	could be enchained, for a total of 74 measures, 2 × 37
8	5	(13 + 24)
10	6	
13	7	Lili seems to have used both 7 and 13 symbolically in this
17	8	song cycle. Song 7 has 42 measures (6 × 7, factors whose
19	9	sum is 13).
20	10	
21	11	
15	12	Its text may have determined this song's placement, in part.
24	13	Song 13 has 125 measures, 5 × 25 (12 + 13)

Figure 3. *Tristesses* by Francis Jammes and *Clairières dans le ciel* by Lili Boulanger. Jammes's poems are not numbered in the 1913 (4th) ed., the only one I have examined.

represented by D's tragic thirteenth in D minor; might B, the dominant of E, then represent Boulanger as D's contented thirteenth in D major?[23]

Measure 5 is in C major, that hoped-for key of song 12. There, under the twelfth and thirteenth syllables of the second line of the song, D and E come together as a major second, *très enveloppé,* as the performance directions in m. 1 instruct, by C major's sunniness, where these tones are the second and third degrees of the scale. Suddenly, E's shadow—her tritone, B-flat—catches hold of D. Hapless D is now enveloped by two aspects of Elle, and her dark side elicits his, for when D and B-flat come together as a major third in m. 6 under the word "aime," D's tritone enters the picture as well. "Aime" is sung on A-flat, as far from D's reach as anything musical can be.[24] Reading up from the bass of the accompaniment in m. 6, A-flat comes between B-flat and her supposed goal, C, and between D and his supposed goal, C, although C-natural is a seductively small distance of only one step away from these two notes. But had they paid attention, B-flat and D might have seen that they are barred from each other, that the stem (*la tige*) of their relationships sprouts (*pousser*) from the bar line that separates them in the vocal line between the words "la tige." The breath mark inserted just before those words and three dynamic marks set off and graphically point to what is, in fact, "the stem" of the entire cycle.[25]

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Chant
Piano
Modéré
simple et songeur
Elle é- tait des-cen- due au bas de la prai-
Modéré
très enveloppé
-ri- e et, com-me la prai- ri- e, é- tait tou- te fleu-
rit.
-ri- e de plan- tes dont la tige aime à pous- ser dans l'eau ces
rit.

She had gone down to the foot of the meadow,
And, like the meadow, was decked with flowers whose stems
love to sprout in water . . .

Example 2. Page 1 of song 1 from *Clairières dans le ciel* by Lili Boulanger, 1970 ed., © 1970 Durand S.A. Used by permission. Sole representative U.S.A. Theodore Presser Company.

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Example 3. A message from Lili Boulanger "hidden" in *Clairières dans le ciel* (1919 Ricordi ed.).

Verification of this lies in a message Lili encoded in *Clairières dans le ciel,* readable only by those who discover the significance of B-flat and D in it. She placed these notes consecutively in the vocal line only five times in the cycle (Ex. 3), always separated by a bar line, eternally existing in separate measures, literally "barred" from

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Song 13, p. 42 "tombé"
-cien- ne et je ne sais com- ment je ne suis pas tom- bé
accel. poco
Song 13, p. 45 "savoir"
Ne plus sen- tir
Agité
Ne plus sa- voir
Agité
p doulourеux

Example 3. continued

ever being together. In each case their underlying harmony is symbolic in expected ways. A gathering of the scattered texts expressed by adjacent B-flats and D's presents a puzzle. Arranging and rearranging the words parodies word games popular in the Boulanger household that Lili enjoyed and at which she excelled.[26] As examination of song 12 has shown, D is B-flat major's twenty-fourth and B-flat is D minor's thirteenth. Since the second of each of the notes in Lili's message is always the longer and the harmony generally supports the idea that the first note is an anacrusis to the key of the second, expressed here seem to be two instances of twenty-four and three of thirteen. Symmetrical placement of the three 13s within the two 24s yields:

Sa- voir ma vie tom- bé[e] fix- ez la tige.
D B-flat B-flat D B-flat D B-flat D D B-flat

24 13 13 13 24
(To know my fallen life gaze at [fix your attention upon] the stem)

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This reading suggests concentration on "la tige" pointing to the richly symbolic measures where those words appear on the first page of song 1. In fact, however, a fixed gaze on her fallen life seems required for full understanding of the personal significance Lili attached to B-flat. The life and the notes illuminate each other. In French as well as English, one can fall ill, fall in love, or be a fallen woman. What, exactly, did she mean?[27]

The difficulty with which the message is uncovered seems to certify that the composer meant to reward time spent learning the symbolism of "the stem" by coming "to know" the flower herself, "Miss Lili," as her American friends called her, undoubtedly pronouncing the name "Lily."[28] Example 4, opening page thirteen of her song cycle, presents the words "sur le lys" (about, or on, the lily). This is m. 24 of song 4, and "lys" (lily) is sung on A-sharp. This musical pun is supported in the accompaniment by an arpeggiation of seven notes, a B-flat-major septuplet that includes B-flat's tritone dressed up as F-flat. B-flat and D are the twelfth and thirteenth notes of the bass accompaniment in this measure, D followed by his minor third. The message seems to be: This cycle is 'about' 'Lily' B (B-flat and its tritone) and D minor. Twelve and thirteen measures later (Ex. 5), "sur el-" is sung on E, the final syllable, "-le," falling to B, all supported by E-major and D-major triads at the piano. This cycle is also "about" "elle" (L) B (E and its dominant) and D major. Three notes represent Lili "elle-même" throughout the cycle: E, B, and B-flat. Two tonalities represent the Poet, D major and D minor. Those bar lines separating the symbolic notes of the hidden message signify the barriers between Lili herself and . . . what? or whom? Had she "fallen for" someone? Whom she might have loved is one question none of the writings about her addresses.

Minimally, that the piece provides "*clairières*" of Lili Boulanger's own association with thirteen in relation somehow to twelve seems overwhelmingly evident to me. Twelve and thirteen are interrelated numbers, of course. "Baker's dozen" is *treize à la douze* in French. Thirteen full moons make a year of twelve months. Musically, twelve semitones create a complete octave, its proportion of 1:2 being realized only when the thirteenth note is sounded. Lili may have utilized in this music as many permutations of twelve and thirteen as she could imagine, for the sheer fun of it. She could have chosen D to represent the Poet simply because the handwritten letter D can be formed by combining the numerals 1 and 2, just as B results from combining 1 and 3. Twenty-four could be a simple doubling of twelve. Figures 4 and 5 are from the 1919 edition of *Clairières*, printed in

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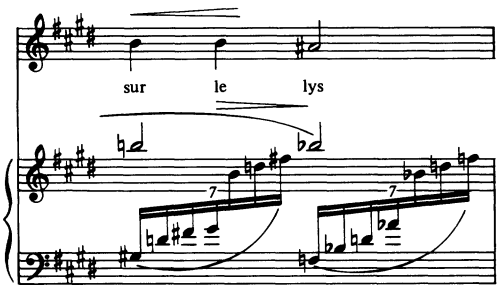
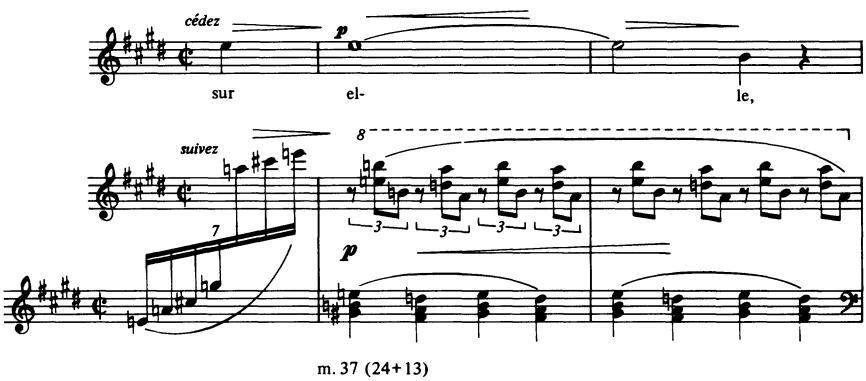


Example 4. From p. 13 of *Clairières dans le ciel:* Song 4, m. 24, "on the lily." © 1970 Durand S.A. Used by permission. Sole representative U.S.A. Theodore Presser Company.



Example 5. From Song 4 of *Clairières dans le ciel,* mm. 36–38. © 1970 Durand S.A. Used by permission. Sole representative U.S.A. Theodore Presser Company.

Italy. Not only is a lily on the cover, confirming contemporary practice of associating this flower with Lili Boulanger, but a different logo from the one on most of Lili's other published work appears on the title page. The numbers twelve and thirteen can both be traced in it.[29] Perhaps the symbolism in *Clairières dans le ciel* is simply an elaborate artistic expression of psychological integration Lili felt after winning the Prix de Rome.[30]

A firm conclusion may not be possible without recourse to Lili Boulanger's personal papers. However, any neoromantic reader of these signs may freely seek in Lili's circle of friends a possible human model for her Poet. Her biography contains several good candidates, not all men. With cautious acknowledgment that a tender trap may

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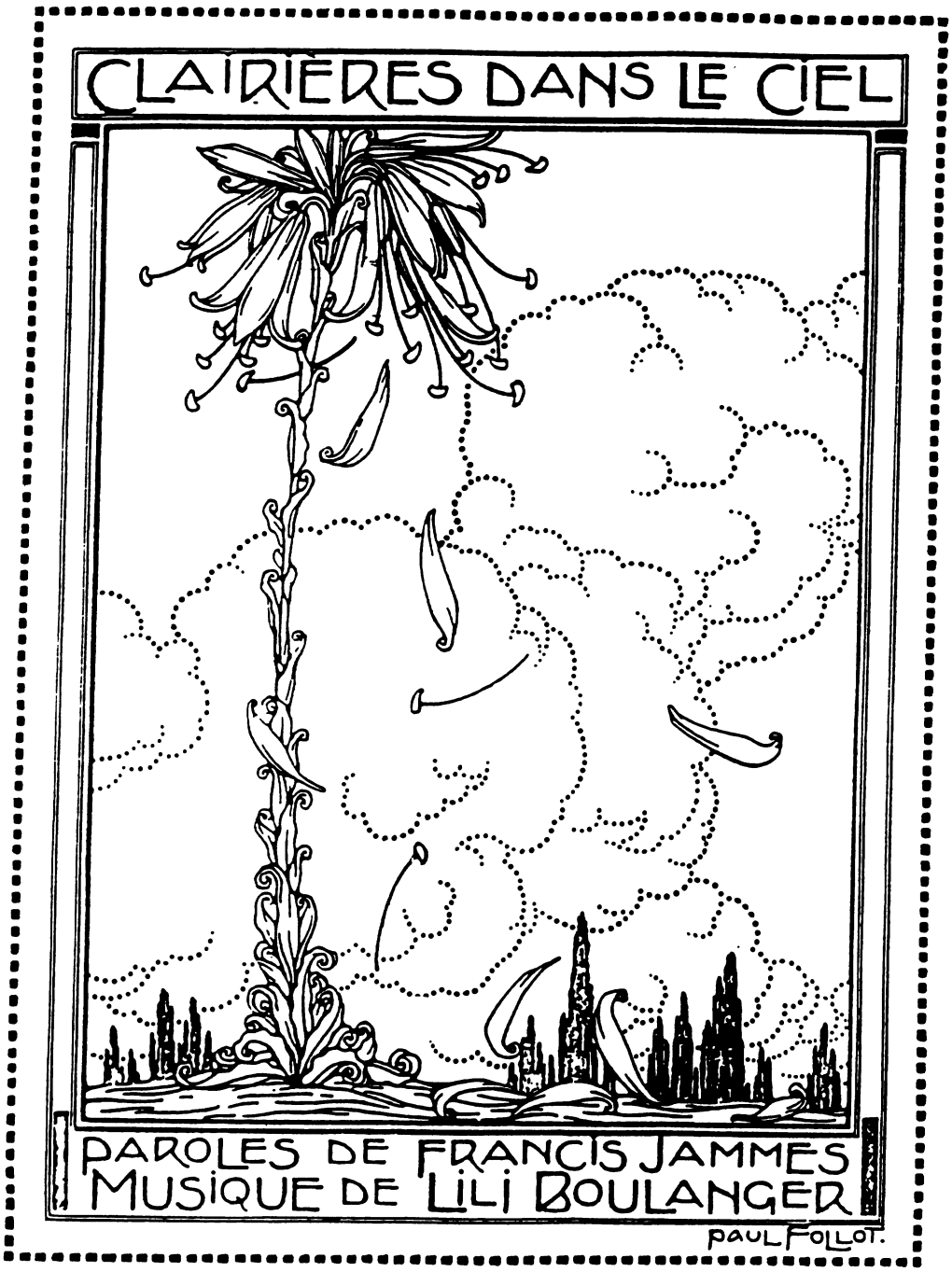

Figure 4. Cover of *Clairières dans le ciel,* 1919 ed., (Ricordi edition, printed in Italy).

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CLAIRIÈRES DANS LE CIEL

FRANCIS JAMMES

* * *

LILI BOULANGER

21 Août 1893 - 15 Mars 1918

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Printed in Italy

Figure 5. Title page of *Clairières dans le ciel,* 1919 ed., (Ricordi edition, printed in Italy), showing Lili Boulanger's second logo, used by Ricordi on six of her published works from 1918 to 1920.

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have lain in wait for these speculations, examining testimony from Nadia Boulanger that this song cycle was "inspired by the voice of David Devriès, the great tenor who had sung in the first performance of *Faust et Hélène* and by his qualities as a musician," seems appropriate here.[31] Devriès was a longtime family friend, who, at thirty-two, married and with two sons, had been conscripted into French military service in August 1914, the month Lili turned twenty-one, and three months before she completed *Clairières*.[32] Lili dedicated song 11 of *Clairières* to this man, who was eleven years older than she, and in her orchestration of song 11, she linked it to song 12, which lacks a dedication, with an instrumental bridge that one scholar thinks serves not to separate them, but to bring them more closely together.[33]

Devriès's name contained twelve letters, three of them D's. His full name could be represented by two twelves, or twenty-four, because each of his handwritten initials required its own "12." Lili had received a box with a medallion of herself on the cover at a party during which Devriès evidently sang some of her music, with Lili at the piano, in December 1913.[34] During her Roman spring, looking back to the twelfth month of 1913, Lili may have been remembering the last time she saw Devriès. These may be reasons that she made the medallion song the twelfth of thirteen, an exceptional displacement of Jammes's order. The words "yellow and blue velvet," in the text of song 2, are set to the symbolic notes discussed here. Lili wore a velvet dress at the first public performance of her Prix de Rome cantata, in November 1913 (11/13). David sang Faust, and afterward they stood together on the stage for applause. To a reviewer for *Le monde musicale,* Lili appeared to be "deeply moved." That dress meant so much to her she asked to be buried in it.[35]

If David Devriès was Lili's secret lost love, the second logo she chose may have represented more than the merging of her number with his. Enclosed in the B of this logo are two perfect D's. In life, Lili may have yearned for the impossible regarding David, but here, on the title page of their song cycle, LB holds DD in an embrace that she knew would outlive them both. Even in changing the title of Jammes's set of poems from his *Tristesses* to *Clairières dans le ciel,* Lili may have provided intentionally for D(avid) and L(ili) to be *très enveloppé* eternally by two happy, uncomplicated C's, taking just the initial letters in the title.[36]

Examination of other songs in *Clairières dans le ciel* reveals not only that Lili's numerological system and playful way with words pervade the work, but that musical gestures introduced early in the work confirm certain aspects of her text painting in later measures. Song 6

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David Devriès (from about 1913 or somewhat later, courtesy Ivan Devriès).

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(half of twelve) is in $\frac{2}{4}$ time, for example, and is set in a tonality centered on A-flat, the Poet's "love note." It employs thirteen instances of an accompaniment figure based on Wagner's Tristan chord; the twelfth alone travels from B-flat to D. This motive carries the same short-long-short rhythmic pattern as that used in the accompaniment under the first instance of the word "triste" in *Clairières dans le ciel,* in the fourth measure of song 3. Song 6 is dedicated to Tito Ricordi, whose firm had published a piano-vocal score of *Tristan und Isolde.* The sole instance of Boulanger's use of the performance direction *tristement* in this cycle occurs in this song. The centrally placed song 7 (poem 13) signals B-flat minor in its key signature; its opening six notes are those of a B-flat-minor seventh chord. In song 8, the word "l'ombre" (shade) is set to the tritones, or shadows, of the notes E and D.[37] Examples of subtle, methodical application of Lili's ingenious system of composition and sense of humor are evident in every song of *Clairières dans le ciel.* Explication of them all is neither required nor possible here.[38] That the result is as musically satisfying as it is intellectually fascinating testifies to an intersection of art and psychology, words and music, beauty and wit, individuality and universality that must inspire further exploration of this remarkable composer's work, deepening our understanding of her relationship to it and enabling performances of it to approximate her intentions.[39]

Even brief acquaintance with her other pieces supports the thesis that Lili identified herself with the notes E, B, and B-flat and that she used numbers significantly elsewhere in her music. Thus, two piano pieces and a piece for violin and piano from the spring of 1914, all small salon pieces in B major or E major, are described by Léonie Rosenstiel as "bubbling over with high spirits" and filled with joie de vivre.[40] On the other hand, "Dans l'immense tristesse," a sad song from 1916 whose text speaks of a mother at the grave of her child, is set in B-flat minor. Its final lone B-flats may also personalize the song for Lili. *Psaume 130,* Boulanger's longest work except for *Clairières dans le ciel,* is from 1917. It has five flats in its key signature, as might be expected from Lili's significant number in the title. Though its tonality is fluid, important sections of it are clearly in B-flat minor.

Lili explored the number twenty-four in other works as well, opening her setting of Psalm 24 (1916), which includes a part for tenor solo, with the double-twelve construct of open fourths and fifths noted in *Clairières dans le ciel* in song 12. Earlier, in June 1914, while in Rome at work on *Clairières dans le ciel,* she had planned twenty-four variations for her *Morceau pour piano—Thème et variations.*[41]

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The importance to Lili of song 12 from *Clairières dans le ciel* may be appreciated by examining the final measures of her last work, *Pie Jesu,* dictated to Nadia as Lili lay mortally ill. This piece ends serenely with thirteen measures with no key signature. In the accompaniment, beginning in the seventh measure of the final thirteen, over a pedal on G in the bass, are octaves repeatedly played on D–E–F–E, the same four notes used in the top of the arched accompaniment pattern of song 12. In B-flat major, G is the thirteenth diatonic scale degree, suggesting the possibility that Lili symbolized her painful earthly life with the note B-flat, then chose in her Requiem fragment to symbolize her spiritual self as thirteen steps above that. This piece ends with a gapped G-major thirteenth chord. Its thirteenth degree is E, formerly weighed down by its tritone, B-flat, now freed, transformed into what must have been for Lili the spiritually significant thirteenth of B-flat's thirteenth.

Did Nadia know of her sister's musical cryptography? She believed that in music "nothing happens without reason, it is simply that the reasons sometimes remain unintelligible to us, because we do not see very far, because we do not take the trouble to look, but they surely exist."[42] Nadia "could analyze a piece down to the last detail, line by line, idea by idea," yet in spite of what Virgil Thomson called her "penetrating instinct for criticism," she never broadcast what this talent may have led her to know about Lili's compositions.[43] She said, "There was not the shadow of a secret in my sister's life," yet she kept most of Lili's personal papers from all eyes.[44] Was she being coy when she wrote in the foreword of Léonie Rosenstiel's biography of Lili, "May your readers find out all that is implied in these pages"? Time and further investigation may yield answers to these and other questions raised by this study and open doors to still more mysteries.

The hallmarks of symbolism include obscurity, indirection, and particularity, the notion that a small symbol carries enough representation in it to stand for a greater whole, rather as a whole song cycle might "stem" from a single measure. More mystically, symbolist poets and artists believed that a symbol presents a greater reality, that it does not simply stand as a sign of a thing but evokes the thing itself when received by a viewer, reader, or listener.[45] "What I am trying to do is create a kind of reality," Debussy said of his orchestral *Images.*[46] Artists who secretly embedded personal symbols in their work believed they were ensuring ongoing life for themselves, not only because their work would survive them but because they held aesthetic principles that endowed symbols with the power of epiphany. Thus, anyone

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receiving the work would feel the presence of whatever or whoever was symbolized in it, regardless of whether the receiver understood the symbols consciously. Evidence in her music suggests that Lili Boulanger was a *symboliste* in the aesthetic tradition of French symbolist poets and artists. She placed occult symbols of herself in her music, and in *Clairières dans le ciel* she apparently hid symbols of at least one other person. She believed that when the songs were heard, the presence of their spirits would be felt. A rare written statement from her seems to confirm this aesthetic attitude. On the opening page of the fair copy of *Clairières dans le ciel* Lili placed this instruction, omitted in publication: "All of these songs should be performed with the feeling of evoking a past that has retained its full freshness."[47]

Notes

This article was presented in slightly compressed form at the Capital Chapter of the American Musicological Society on 29 January 1994, followed by a performance by James McDonald and Ruth Ann McDonald of several songs from *Clairières dans le ciel.* I gratefully acknowledge the advice and encouragement my work has received from Léonie Rosenstiel and from members of the faculty at the University of Maryland. Carol Robertson and Thomas DeLio offered indispensable critical commentary, and Shelley G. Davis generously helped in shaping and editing my material.

1. Léonie Rosenstiel, *Nadia Boulanger: A Life in Music* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982), 207.

2. "Secret Languages: The Roots of Modernism," *Critical Inquiry* (1984), 461, n. 26.

3. Papus (Gérard Encausse), writing around 1885, reassured initiates against the fear that through his writings he had revealed "occult science" to those outside: "Experience has taught us that . . . those only who should understand can understand; the others will accuse our work of being obscure and incomprehensible"; Papus, *The Tarot of the Bohemians,* trans. A. P. Morton (New York: Arcanum Books, 1958), 12.

4. First described by George Perle in "The Secret Programme of the *Lyric Suite,*" *Musical Times* 118 (Aug.–Oct. 1977), 629–32, 709–13, 809–13. Eric Sams summarizes coded uses of music notation in "Cryptography, musical" in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians,* ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1980), v 5:78–82. Sams declares there is a "demonstrable kinship between the musical and the cryptographic mind," defending his statement with appropriate examples and an extensive bibliography.

5. Rosenstiel, *The Life and Works of Lili Boulanger* (Madison, N.J.: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1978). Reference is also made here to Rosenstiel's article on Boulanger, "Lili Boulanger (1893–1918)," in *Historical Anthology of Music by Women,* ed. James R. Briscoe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 233, and to a letter from Rosenstiel to me dated 15 May 1991.

6. Her incomplete recovery from bronchial pneumonia when she was two years old left her immune system severely damaged. Thereafter, she developed Crohn's disease,

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then called intestinal tuberculosis, and was often weak and always vulnerable to illness. Rosenstiel, *Nadia Boulanger,* 36.

7. Rosenstiel states that Lili was determined to "bring back to the family" this prize, which her father had won in 1835 and her sister had attempted to gain in 1906, 1907, 1908, and 1909; Rosenstiel, *Life and Works* 46. In some years, three prizes were awarded for music: a First Grand Prize, including a gold medal, a stay of four years in the Villa Medici in Rome, a small monthly stipend, and guaranteed public performances of all works composed while in residence in Rome; a Second First Grand Prize, which was a silver medal, a smaller monthly stipend, and a shorter stay in Rome; and a Second Grand Prize, a bronze medal and a small lump-sum cash award, the prize Nadia won in 1908. Rosenstiel, *Nadia Boulanger,* 59.

8. She studied composition privately with Georges Caussade, with Nadia for a few months in 1911, and with Paul Vidal at the Paris Conservatory.

9. She won the prize by a huge majority: thirty-one (represented numerically, thirteen backwards) of a possible thirty-six votes; Rosenstiel, *Life and Works,* 78.

10. Rosenstiel, *Life and Works,* 35 and 43. Nadia was evidently Rosenstiel's sole source for the date of Lili's first composition, the number of compositions Lili destroyed, and the fact that pieces set to texts of 1 Corinthians 13, Psalm 131, and Psalm 137 were among them. Lili's setting of Psalm 130, from 1917, was dedicated to the memory of her father. She also set Psalms 24 and 129, in 1916. The significance Lili may have attached to the numbers twenty-four and twelve is discussed in this article.

11. Rosenstiel, *Life and Works,* 168. This is the only observation Rosenstiel makes of Lili's application of the number thirteen to the notes of her compositions. Of the many sources on the meanings that numbers carry in human culture, the following selected titles offer helpful insights and historic context: François-Xavier Chaboche, *Vie et mystère des nombres* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1976); Georges Ifrah, *From One to Zero: A Universal History of Numbers,* trans. by Lowell Blair (New York: Viking, 1985); Gertrude Jobes, *Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore, and Symbols* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1962).

12. Papus, *Tarot,* 157. The bibliography of *Tarot of the Bohemians* presents a select catalog of books on arcane subjects published or actively used in France in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Books by Mme. Blavatsky, works on the horoscope, treatises on the Cabala, Buddhism, Egyptian hieroglyphics, ancient texts from Virgil, the New Testament Apocalypse, and another book by Papus that by 1887 was in its fourth edition, *Traité elémentaire de science occulte,* were all available for consultation or discussion by the public at large, including women, who earlier had been excluded from the secrets of exclusively male occult groups. Defiant adoption of the number thirteen as a sign of good luck is not uncommon; another early-twentieth-century case is that of Florenz Ziegfeld, Jr., born on the ides of March 1867, who carefully eliminated his own name from the title of his show so that the appellation "Follies of 1907" would have the good fortune of containing thirteen characters; see Charles Higham, *Ziegfield* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1972), 63. Perhaps the part of the Nadia Boulanger collection in the Bibliothèque Nationale closed to researchers until 2009 will yield documentary evidence concerning how Lili regarded "her" number. Included in it may be letters and diaries from Lili's hand, and, one hopes, the autograph scores of songs 1 and 3 of *Clairières,* the only two of the thirteen that are

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missing from the Musée Marmottan, according to Annegret Fauser (letter to me dated 10 May 1993).

13. Fauser has written extensively about *Clairières dans le ciel,* beginning with her "Die Musik hinter der Legende: Lili Boulangers Liederzyklus *Clairières dans le ciel,*" *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 151 (Nov. 1990): 9–14. Jacques Chailley also focuses on these measures in his "L'Œuvre de Lili Boulanger," *La revue musicale* 353–54 (1982): 29.

14. "Fusion between the young girl evoked by Francis Jammes . . . and herself"; Rosenstiel, *Life and Works,* 276, n. 43.

15. Dates of composition are taken from sketches examined by Fauser in "Die Musik hinter der Legende." Lili Boulanger died in a year when the ides of March fell on a Friday. The ides of eight out of the twelve months of the Roman calendar fall on the thirteenth of the month. This fateful synchronicity parallels Arnold Schoenberg's birth and death dates. He was born on 13 Sept. 1874 and died on Friday, 13 July, the year he was seventy-six (7 + 6 = 13). Rich commentary on Schoenberg's numerological beliefs and his special dread of the number thirteen is given in Joan Peyser's *20th Century Music: The Sense behind the Sound* (New York: Schirmer, 1971). Schoenberg is famous for having said of his preoccupation with numerology, "It is not superstition, it is belief."

16. Sylvie Croguennoc, "Les mélodies de Lili Boulanger," in *Actes du colloque "Autour de la mélodie Francaise,"* ed. Michelle Biget ([Rouen:] Publications de l'Université de Rouen no. 124, 1984), 110.

17. Or was she identifying herself with seven as well, linking seven and thirteen as closely as sunshine and shadow, as inevitably as notes in a tritone relationship, as satisfyingly as comedy and tragedy are bound together in countless successful works of art? Surely she noticed that her Prix de Rome had been awarded in the seventh month of 1913; perhaps she felt doubly blessed. Considering the title of her cycle, her placement of poem 13 *au septième ciel* seems joyfully apt.

18. All the notes of the opening chords of the accompaniment of song 12 may be combined in thirds, and the constructs can be named: D–D perfect intervals, C^7 or e^{13}, $B\flat^9$ or f^{13}, d.

19. For a fuller discussion of levels of symbolism in this piece, see my "Symbolism in the Music of Lili Boulanger: An Analysis of *Clairières dans le ciel*" (master's thesis, University of Maryland at College Park, 1993).

20. Lili apparently used both public and private symbols in her work. Thus, thirteen sometimes is a rather superficial indicator of ill luck and at other times seems to be an intensely personal sign for herself. Jammes's Poet is assumed to be male; the set is subtitled *Le Poète et sa femme.* Whether Lili assigned this gender to the Poet remains an open question. This article argues that she did.

21. Other examples of Lili's fondness for "esoteric" communication systems are exhibited in her biography. She attempted to learn a variety of languages, among them Russian, English, and Italian. She knew Cyrillic script. Her mother and sister also knew German. Lili was so desperate for privacy as a closely chaperoned, sick young child that she communicated with the boy next door in an invented language known only to the two of them. Rosenstiel thinks it was her inventiveness in the

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arcane language of musical notation that gave Lili a means of achieving "complete intellectual and artistic autonomy"; Rosenstiel, *Life and Works,* 47, and *Nadia Boulanger,* 56.

22. Since 12 + 13 = 25, Lili's making her songs 1 and 3 from Jammes's poems 2 and 5 could have signified to her an additional encompassing of twelve and thirteen.

23. If so, Lili would have been using the English system of naming notes here, in addition to the French and German. She knew some English and was clever at words and letters, so this is possible; see Rosenstiel, *Life and Works,* 37. In "Anagrammes musicales et 'langages communicables'," *Revue de musicologie* 67 (1981): 69–79, Jacques Chailley discusses the use of both a "clef allemande" and a "clef anglaise" in French cryptographic pieces. In song 7, Lili sets the syllables "ombra-" (Ital. shade) to B-flat and C-flat (or B), suggesting that the two sounds are shadows of each other.

24. "Amour" is sung on D and A-flat in song 10. The two notes are separated by a bar line, portraying an unscalable wall between D and love.

25. "Tige" is the thirty-first articulated syllable of the cycle, sung on B-flat. The thirteenth syllable, ending the first line, is sung on E.

26. Rosenstiel, *Life and Works,* 51.

27. Rosenstiel has suggested in a private conversation that the incorrect gender of "tombé" here indicates that only part of Lili's message has been discovered. I think the feminine "e" is simply implied, but I think that a search for other buried messages in Lili's music is justified by the presence of this one.

28. Rosenstiel, *Nadia Boulanger,* 53.

29. Only copies of the 1919 edition of *Clairières dans le ciel* printed in Italy seem to use this logo, though it is found on several other of her Ricordi scores printed in France. It appears in Miki Piré's privately published book of poems written in remembrance of Lili, *En recueillement* (Paris: Floury, 1920), as shown by Rosenstiel, *Life and Works,* 208. Piré illustrated her poems with watercolors depicting a variety of lilies; might she have designed this logo? Because the numerals 2 and 3 can both be seen in it so clearly, the logo's intentional design must be assumed. Evidently, Piré never called attention to this square logo in her interviews with Rosenstiel. Further research into its origins may clarify some of its mysteries.

30. The performance at which Lili's cantata won the Prix de Rome was given on 5 July 1913. Adding the numbers for the month and day yields twelve, another intersection of twelve and thirteen that Lili could well have noted.

31. Rosenstiel, *Life and Works,* 189.

32. In a letter to me dated 10 June 1993, Ivan Devriès, an accomplished composer living in Paris, writes that his father was born on 14 Feb. 1882, tells of David's war service, and mentions having had an older brother. He does not remember meeting Lili Boulanger, who died when he was only nine years old.

33. Annegret Fauser, "Zur Orchestrierung der '*Clairières dans le Ciel,*' " in *Vom Schweigen befreit: 3. Internationales Komponistinnen-Festival Kassel. 12.–16.5.1993: Lili Boulanger,* catalog, ed. Roswitha Aulenkamp-Moeller and Cristel Nies, 61.

34. Rosenstiel, *Life and Works,* 91.

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35. Rosenstiel does not name its color. The dress was given to Lili by Miki Piré, who had also given Lili the set of Jammes poems; Rosenstiel, *Life and Works,* 133.

36. Lili received the poet's permission to make this change. Her title is the one Jammes used as the title of the collection in which *Tristesses* was published; Rosenstiel, *Life and Works,* 96. "CDL[Elle]C" presents notes 1 + 2 and notes 1 + 3 (albeit backwards, an orientation of no consequence in some numerological systems) of the C-major scale.

37. Thus, Lili supplements her earlier indication of the shadowy relationship between B-flat and B, described in n. 23 above. A superficial pun is also presented here, for Lili respells B-flat and A-flat as A-sharp and G-sharp, respectively, in setting the words "regard" and "l'ombre" in adjoining measures, thus providing a clever explanation for her orthography should someone like Nadia inquire into it.

38. Deep familiarity with *Clairières dans le ciel* exposes what appear to be personal symbols beyond those representing Lili and the Poet and more characters described in the songs than just those of the Poet and Elle. For example, if Miki Piré designed the square logo at Lili's suggestion, Lili could have told her that the two and three in it stood for the second and third degrees of the scale, *ré* and *mi,* syllables in the artist's own name. In her notes on *Clairières dans le ciel* for a performance given on 15 May 1993 at the Third International Woman Composers Festival in Kassel, Birgit Stièvenard-Salomon sees Piré's name encrypted in the movement from E major to D minor in the songs of Lili's cycle. Perhaps the Poet is female in Lili's mind, standing either as a mirror of herself or for her closest woman friend. Symbolic notes in the piece may carry a variety of meanings, depending on their context. On page thirty-one of the cycle, in m. 7 of song 10, the words "sa sœur" appear, sung on E and D (*mi* and *ré,* the first and last syllables of Miki Piré's name). Is this a signal from Lili that she considered her friend to be a sister? The text of this song deals with two columbines whose hearts are intertwined by the wind. Lili changed the poet's "leurs cœurs bleus" to the singular: their blue heart. Thirteen times she used an accompaniment figure that combines E minor and D minor. In a paper written for the Lili Boulanger festival in Bremen in Aug. 1993, Rosenstiel characterized Lili as "the deepest emotional attachment" of Miki Piré's life and said Piré found Lili "a thoroughgoing mystic, believing deeply in portents and signs, and the underlying messages and meanings that could be conveyed by numbers and words. That was a preoccupation that both friends shared." In that case, Lili surely knew that Piré would seek "portents and signs" in this music and could well have meant for Miki to believe that she was portrayed by at least some of the E's and D's in *Clairières dans le ciel.*

39. That there is no currently available tenor recording of *Clairières dans le ciel* seems unfortunate in light of these discoveries. The choice of excerpts from the cycle to program may be guided by a desire to include all the words of Lili's hidden message. Special care in presenting the symbolic notes may now be used and great attention paid to text syllabication.

40. Rosenstiel, *Life and Works,* 171.

41. Gottfried Eberle discusses this piece in a program note published in the Kassel festival catalog *Vom Schweigen befreit,* 139.

42. Alan Kendall, *The Tender Tyrant: Nadia Boulanger,* a *Life Devoted to Music* (Wilton, Conn.: Lyceum, 1976), 113.

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43. Rosenstiel, *Nadia Boulanger*, 228.

44. Bruno Monsaingeon, *Mademoiselle: Conversations with Nadia Boulanger*, trans. Robyn Marsack (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1985), 82.

45. For this succinct description of aspects of the symbolist aesthetic I am indebted to Gordon E. Bigelow's study *The Poet's Third Eye: A Guide to the Symbolists of Modern Literature* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1976), 97–136.

46. Thus, the natural golden section proportions and logarithmic spirals of seashells Debussy used in *La mer* may have been for him symbolic of an ocean, or of Hokusai's print *The Hollow of the Wave off Kanagawa,* which Debussy arranged to have reproduced on the cover of the first edition of the score of *La mer.* Its design also approximates a logarithmic spiral and golden section proportions. This synesthetic ambition was typical of Debussy's time; see Roy Howat's comprehensive study *Debussy in Proportion: A Musical Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

47. "Toute ces mélodies doivent être chantées avec le sentiment d'evoquer un passé resté plein de fraîcheur"; Fauser, "Die Musik hinter der Legende," 10, and letter to author. Fauser and others who have studied the sketchbooks for *Clairières dans le ciel* have never indicated that they overtly mention extramusical symbolism. Fauser reports that the available manuscript scores of *Clairières dans le ciel* appear to have been written by several different people, including Lili and Nadia (letter). That only the manuscripts for songs 1 and 3 are unavailable seems beyond coincidence (see n. 12 above). Ivan Devriès says, "I remember having seen a score of *Clairières dans le ciel* among my father's music. This score bore a dedication in Lili's hand. Alas, I don't remember the text or date and I have not been in possession of the score for a long time now" (letter to author; my translation). This may have been an autograph score, or part of one, since Lili died before the song cycle was published. Or perhaps Lili wrote a dedication on a separate leaf that was inserted in a copy of the published score presented to David Devriès later. Nadia and David performed *Clairières dans le ciel* at least once, as a printed program dated 3 June 1919 attests; *Vom Schweigen befreit,* 110.

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